An underwater photograph of a coral reef. The scene is dominated by large, branching coral structures in shades of white, yellow, and light blue. Several small, orange and black striped fish are swimming throughout the water column. The background is a deep, dark blue, suggesting a clear but deep underwater environment. The overall lighting is somewhat dim, highlighting the textures of the coral and the colors of the fish.

U.S. All Islands Coral Reef Committee (AIC) Report

**U.S. Coral Reef Task Force Meeting
Washington D.C.
February 18-20, 2014**



U.S. All Islands Coral Reef Committee (AIC) Report

**U.S. Coral Reef Task Force Meeting
Washington D.C. | February 18-20, 2014**

New

New

New

New

New

AIC Vision

Thriving coral reef ecosystems, effectively managed to protect their cultural, environmental, and economic value for future generations.

AIC Mission

To be a unified voice for the effective management of coral reef ecosystems in the U.S. and Freely Associated States.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

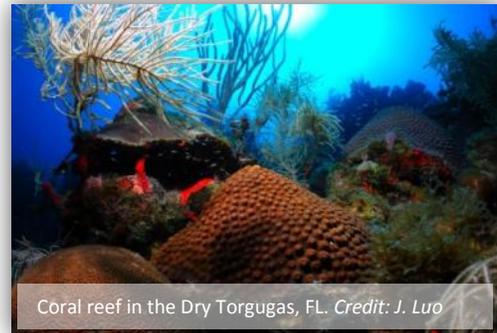
From the Chair	1
Committee Updates	2
AIC Strategic Plan 2015-2019	2
New Vision and Mission Statements	2
New Outreach Materials	2
Website	2
Proposed ESA-Listing of Coral Species	2
Coral Reef Conservation Act Reauthorization	3
Coral Reef Management Fellowship Program	3
Updates from AIC Jurisdictions	4
American Samoa	4
Florida	5
Guam	5
Hawai'i	5
Puerto Rico	5
U.S. Virgin Islands	6
Updates from AIC Affiliate Jurisdictions	6
Federated States of Micronesia	6
Republic of the Marshall Islands	6
Republic of Palau	6
Summary	7
Acknowledgements	7
AIC Points of Contact, Affiliate Members, Advisors, and Secretariat	7
Points of Contact	7
Affiliate Members	7
AIC Advisors	7
Secretariat	7



FROM THE CHAIR

Hafa adai, Talofa, Aloha, Hola, and Hello,

It is my pleasure, on behalf of the U.S. All Islands Coral Reef Committee (AIC), to present this report on our activities, accomplishments, and emerging issues since we last met in St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands in November 2013. We have reformatted our Chair's Report to better highlight the priorities of the AIC in a simpler and more succinct fashion.



Welcome to Governor Lolo Matalasi Moliga from American Samoa, Governor Eloy S. Inos from the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and Governor John P. deJongh, Jr. from the U.S. Virgin Islands.

We welcome the new Task Force co-chair for the U.S. Department of the Interior, Lori Faeth, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and International Affairs. We look forward to working with Lori in continuing the good work of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force in the conservation and management of our coral reefs.

We also welcome Eileen Sobeck, sitting in for NOAA co-chair Mark Schaefer, PhD. We would like to congratulate Eileen in her new position as Assistant Administrator for NOAA Fisheries and look forward to working with her in her new capacity.

Special thanks to the U.S. Department of the Interior for hosting this meeting and to the Steering Committee co-chairs for their work in planning this meeting.

We would also like to congratulate Governor Eddie Baza Calvo of Guam and Governor Neil Abercrombie of Hawaii for their appointment to the President's Task Force on Climate Preparedness and Resilience.

We look forward to a successful Task Force meeting and continuing open communications and partnership building to help conserve our precious coral reef ecosystems.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fran Castro".

Fran Castro
Chair



COMMITTEE UPDATES

AIC STRATEGIC PLAN 2015-2019: The AIC is working on updating their strategic plan for the next five years and held an all day planning workshop on Monday, February 17, 2014.

NEW VISION AND MISSION STATEMENTS: The AIC recently updated and changed their vision and mission statements. This is part of work that is being done to update the AIC Strategic Plan for the next five years.

- **AIC VISION:** Thriving coral reef ecosystems, effectively managed to protect their cultural, environmental, and economic value for future generations.
- **AIC MISSION:** To be a unified voice for the effective management of coral reef ecosystems in the U.S. and Freely Associated States.

NEW OUTREACH MATERIALS: The AIC recently finalized 1-pagers on American Samoa and Guam. These are available on the AIC website (<http://allislandscommittee.org/whatwedo/publications/>) along with 1-pagers on the AIC, local action strategies, CNMI, and Republic of the Marshall Islands.

WEBSITE: Please note that the AIC website address has changed to <http://allislandscommittee.org/>.

PROPOSED ESA-LISTING OF CORAL SPECIES

The potential listing of 66 species of corals under the Endangered Species Act continues to be a major concern for the jurisdictions that comprise the AIC.

We want the determination for any listing to be made with the best and most current science and information available. That said, the information contained in the just-released ecoregional report by Dr. John "Charlie" Veron is significant, particularly in evaluating risk of extinction and should be incorporated into the evaluation. Additionally important are the findings of the IPCC's "Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis."

Recognized world experts on coral taxonomy, biogeography, ecology, and conservation biology have all indicated that the selection of species put forth in the petition by the Center for Biological Diversity, and under consideration by NOAA, is not supported by a risk of extinction based on either distribution or threat, as required under ESA. Additionally, the determination tool for species selection by both the Biological Review Team and NOAA had serious flaws (or limitations), as described in Section 5, Methods, of *Status Review Report of 82 Candidate Coral Species Petitioned Under the U.S. Endangered Species Act* page 102.

The jurisdictions have a great deal at stake and a decision to list any corals as *endangered* is likely to do more harm than good. The AIC's concern is that listing of corals as endangered under ESA will divert already limited resources (jurisdictional and Federal) away from meaningful efforts to control local stressors such as sedimentation, pollution and overfishing, and the global drivers of climate change.

And if any corals merit a *threatened* designation, the 4D rule is a powerful tool in helping protect, manage, and recover species and their associated ecosystems. The 4D rule allows for flexible application of management tools with the greatest chance of affecting the positive outcomes for coral reefs and stakeholders.



The AIC would like NOAA to reevaluate their determination tool, given the information in Dr. Veron's report and IPCC's Climate Change 2013 report. The AIC would also ask that Task Force agencies continue to engage the jurisdictions as this process progresses, particularly in any 4D rule-making, to help ensure the most effective management of coral reefs.

CORAL REEF CONSERVATION ACT REAUTHORIZATION

One of the AIC's top priorities remains the reauthorization of the Coral Reef Conservation Act (CRCA) of 2000. The current fiscal and political climates make it unlikely that the Act will be reauthorized this year. However, the AIC believes it is important to keep CRCA reauthorization *on Congress' radar*. The AIC believes reauthorization bills in both houses of Congress contain critical measures to protect and manage coral reef ecosystems in the U.S and the islands where the management needs for the nation's coral reefs are greatest. Moreover, reauthorization is a much more logical path to effectively managing coral reefs than listing corals under the Endangered Species Act.

There are three components of the Act of particular importance to the jurisdictions:

- Formalizing the definitions of *coral* and *coral reef*;
- Articulating capacity and authority for response to coral reef ecosystem-related emergencies; and
- Ratifying the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force.

The AIC has been and will continue to be in communication with various Congressional offices as a proponent for reauthorization. **The AIC will also continue to work with the Task Force, particularly NOAA and the Department of the Interior, on building support for the reauthorization of the CRCA through finding areas of common ground.**

CORAL REEF MANAGEMENT FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

The Coral Reef Management Fellowship Program responds to one of the biggest needs in all coral reef jurisdictions and an identified target issue for the Task Force—increased coral reef management capacity. This program has helped build capacity while providing the opportunity for fellows to gain professional experience, expertise, and understanding of coral reef resources and management at the jurisdictional level – knowledge that nearly all fellows have taken with them to build careers in this field.

In 2012, the decision was made to discontinue the NOAA Coral Reef Management Fellowship Program and the program for FY13 was shortened to one year, with an option provided to the jurisdictions to fund the second year with jurisdictional funds (NOAA CRCP Cooperative Agreement funds or otherwise). Notification of this decision was made to each jurisdiction and the rationale detailed in, "Rationale for Discontinuing the Coral Fellowship Program in FY13". An FY14 proposal was submitted to NOAA CRCP's internal call for proposals, which outlined a new Coral Reef Management Fellowship Program, based on the needs of the AIC and tenets of NOAA CRCP. This proposal was not funded.

The AIC continues to work with NOAA CRCP to build a new, more effective Fellows Program. The AIC crafted their tenets for the Fellows Program and shared these with CRCP in January 2014 (below). The



AIC will be meeting with CRCP staff for a ½ day meeting in Washington D.C. on Friday, February 21, 2014.

Because of the importance in building capacity in the jurisdictions and past success of this program, the AIC asks Task Force member agencies to work with us to support building a sustainable, long-term, and effective Coral Reef Management Fellowship Program.

AIC Tenets: *The AIC envisions the Coral Reef Management Fellowship Program as a program that...*

- Provides on the ground experience in the fields of coral reef science/management, at the local level, that will help to hone the fellows' understanding and professional skill set for working on coral reef ecosystems and resources.
- Provides professional development training and opportunities to interact and connect with government agencies and partners working on coral reef ecosystem and related resource management in the local jurisdiction.
- Builds and helps maintain capacity in the field of coral reef management, regardless of whether the fellow remains in the host agency or jurisdiction.
- Equips fellows with experience to guide next steps in pursuing a career working in coral reef and natural resources management.
- Allows important work on coral reefs to be completed while building local management capacity.
- Meets objectives in each of the seven coral reef jurisdictions' Management Priorities documents and helps to fill critical gaps identified within jurisdictional Capacity Assessments.

UPDATES FROM AIC JURISDICTIONS

AMERICAN SAMOA

- Crown of Thorns Starfish outbreak continues to expand and is a significant threat to Tutuila coral reef ecosystems.
- A Moratorium on the take of sea cucumbers has been established to assess populations to inform future management efforts.
- Territorial staff and community members were trained in coral gardening techniques to support ongoing tsunami recovery efforts.



Crown of Thorns devouring healthy coral on the north side of Tutuila. *Credit: National Parks of American Samoa*

COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

- CNMI Reef Resilience Studies are providing information on nine metrics related to reef health and recommendations for future management.
- Autonomous Reef Monitoring Systems have been deployed in the harbors and marinas to help develop baselines for monitoring the potential arrival of marine invasive species.
- Researchers continue to expand the CoralWatch community training and data collection program to the snorkeling and diving community of Saipan.



NOAA diver installing an ARMS unit. *Credit: NOAA PIFSC*



FLORIDA

- Florida Keys monitoring shows two successive years of increased coral cover. After the 2010 cold water mass coral mortality event this indicates that some recovery is possible.
- Successful *Our Florida Reefs* Community Working Group event held to kick off new community planning process for coral reef management options in southeast Florida.



Our Florida Reefs Community Working Group kickoff event held on January 23, 2014 at the National Coral Reef Institute's Center for Coral Reef Excellence. Credit: Christopher Boykin, Florida's Coral Reef Conservation Program

GUAM

- Data collection of coral reef health parameter continues at sampling stations (e.g., Tumon Bay, East Agana Bay).
- A workshop was held to understand the importance of adhering to erosion and sediment control practices per local and federal requirements.
- In December 2013, the 3rd annual Pig Derby was held to reduce erosion and sedimentation loading onto Guam's coral reefs caused by invasive feral ungulates.



Weighing the catch with the help of a wheel barrel to lift up. Credit: Christine Camacho, Watershed Special Projects Coordinator, GCMP of BSP

HAWAI'I

- DLNR Aquatics Division completed strategic planning workshop and is in process of developing a realignment plan with a focus on ecosystem-based management.
- West Maui Kumuwai social marketing campaign honored by *The Maui News* as 2013 People Who Made a Difference in Maui.
- West Hawai'i Fisheries Management Area rules amended to prohibit take of sharks/rays, include 40 species permitted for aquarium fishery take, and prohibit SCUBA spearfishing.



Under revised West Hawaii Fishery Management Area rules adopted in December of 2013, take of sharks and rays is now prohibited in the waters of West Hawaii. Credit: James Watt, NOAA

PUERTO RICO

- Signing of MOU/Co-management Collaborative Agreement (1/23/14), between DNER, Arrecifes Pro Ciudad, and the Municipality of Carolina, to protect the Isla Verde Reef Marine Reserve.
- Administrative Order was passed to prohibit fishing at the Isla Verde Reef Marine Reserve on January 23, 2014.
- \$400,000 was allocated for the detour construction of the access road to the Vieques Bioluminescent Bay Natural Reserve as a means to reduce sedimentation at the Reserve.



Secretary, Mayor of Carolina (José Aponte-Dalmau), and Paco Lopez with members of the Mgmt. Board of the Reserve. Credit: Arrecifes Pro Ciudad



U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

- Completed the permitting process for St. Thomas East End Reserves (STEER) marker buoys. Buoys are ordered and set to be installed in March.
- STEER flood mitigation project selected and first partners meeting with public and private entities held to present commitments.
- First Caribbean Regional Ocean Partnership (CROP) stakeholder meeting held in St. Croix, February 6, 2014. CROP planning team meeting to set 2014 calendar for stakeholder meetings held February 7, 2014.



Map of STEER where the marker buoys will be installed. *Credit: Dept. of Planning and Natural Resources*

UPDATES FROM AIC AFFILIATE JURISDICTIONS

FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA

- Yap, Kosrae, and Pohnpei States passed Shark/Manta Sanctuary Laws; draft legislation under review in Chuuk.
- Integrated Climate Change Outreach – e.g. Pohnpei Climate Change Outreach Committee has helped several communities to develop vulnerability assessments.
- Coral monitoring activities fully standardized across the FSM, with datasets included in peer-reviewed publications, documenting status of marine resources.



Coral monitoring in Pohnpei. *Credit: FSM*

REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS

No updates

REPUBLIC OF PALAU

- Protected Areas Network Office integrates the use of the Micronesia Protected Areas Management Effectiveness tool to assess PAN sites.
- Association of Palau Conservation Officers underwent training with instructors from Guam's Division of Aquatics and Wildlife Resources.
- Palau's National Environmental Protection Council is established by Presidential Order to streamline and coordinate nationwide conservation efforts.



Steven Victor (TNC) conducts training for PAN Office & PAN Fund. *Credit: S. Victor, TNC*



SUMMARY

The AIC...

- Appreciates the Governors' support for and urges them to continue supporting the reauthorization of the Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000, in particular, the definitions for *coral* and *coral reef*, articulation of capacity and authority for emergency response, and ratification of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force;
- Urges NOAA to reevaluate their decision tool, given the information in Dr. Charlie Veron's report and IPCC's Climate Change 2013 report.
- Urges the Task Force to continue to engage the jurisdictions as this process progresses, particularly in any 4D rule-making, to help ensure the effective management of coral reefs;
- Urges the members of the Task Force to continue to work with the AIC on building support for the reauthorization of the CRCA through finding areas of common ground;
- Encourages Task Force member agencies to work with the AIC to build a renewed Coral Reef Management Fellowship Program; and
- Encourages Task Force member agencies to help the AIC ensure a sustainable and effective Coral Reef Management Fellowship Program.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Thank you to Governor Lolo Matalasi Moliga from American Samoa, Governor Eloy S. Inos from CNMI, and Governor John P. deJongh, Jr. from USVI, for participating in the Task Force meeting. Your continued support of the AIC and coral reef conservation and management is greatly appreciated.
- Thank you to the U.S. Department of the Interior for hosting this Task Force meeting.
- To the Task Force member agencies, particularly NOAA and DOI, thank you for your continued support and partnership over the years. We hope to continue on this path of open and honest discussions.
- Thank you to the Steering Committee co-chairs for their work in planning and executing this meeting.

AIC POINTS OF CONTACT, AFFILIATE MEMBERS, ADVISORS, AND SECRETARIAT

POINTS OF CONTACT

Ms. Fran Castro, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, AIC Chair
Ms. Damaris Delgado, Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, AIC Vice Chair
Dr. Ruth Matagi-Tofiga, Territory of American Samoa
Mr. Joseph Cameron, Territory of Guam
Ms. Joanna Walczak, State of Florida
Ms. Emma Anders, State of Hawai'i
Mr. Jean-Pierre Oriol, Territory of the U.S. Virgin Islands

AIC ADVISORS

Mr. Gerry Davis, AIC Resource Advisor
Dr. Michael Hamnett, AIC Policy Advisor
Dr. Robert Richmond, AIC Science Advisor

SECRETARIAT

Ms. Carey Morishige, Executive director

AFFILIATE MEMBERS

Mr. Don Hess, Republic of the Marshall Islands
Ms. Alissa Takesy, Federated States of Micronesia



Mr. Umiich Sengebau, Republic of Palau